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***Theory vs. Practice? Understanding a Silent Revolution in German Art Music Festivals (it’s already happened, but nobody’s noticed yet)***

This paper will survey several important institutions for contemporary music in Germany, including the Berlin Festspiele’s Märzmusik Festival, the Donnaueschinger Musiktage, and the International Music Institute Darmstadt (IMD). Each of them have recently appointed new artistic directors that represent a radical shift in the priorities and direction of the institutions. It will be argued that this shift towards institutional practices can be called “curatorial,” as directors now see experimentation with institutional forms themselves as a “practice” of staging knowledge production. Surprisingly, these programs are emphasizing critical knowledge and forms of institutional critique, confronting e.g. the euro-centric bias of Western art music, and supporting the feminist activist group GRINM, all to an extent disproportional to the field as a whole where these topics are still rare. This paper will contextualize these practices within larger debates in the arts, showing that they fit into a wider renewed engagement with the mechanisms and workings of institutions themselves in the field of curatorial studies (c.f. new institutionalism). This is seen in neighbouring initiatives such as documenta 14 Director Adam Szymczyk’s attempt to come to terms with and challenge the exhibition’s own inner workings, and the fiery resistance against Chris Dercon’s directorship of the Berlin Volksbühne. These examples will show that institutional critique is still possible, also from leadership positions, though under circumstances different than before its undermining by late capitalism. Second, this contextualizing of music’s new curators will be used to speculate on the future of these important festivals and the musical practices they support, arguing that accompanying this shift there must be an analogous shift in musical education for it to be successful. Ultimately, this transdisciplinary approach will help achieve a coherent approach, often lacking in musicology, to the relationship between musical practice and institutional power.

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